

Media, PA —

“I could not be more pleased to learn President-elect Obama has chosen Gen. Eric K. Shinseki to be the next Secretary of The Department of Veterans Affairs. He is a leader of enormous strength, character and vision,” said Congressman Sestak. “His service as Army Chief of Staff makes him extraordinarily qualified to address the issue of transitioning our men and women from the armed forces into the VA system. That process is far from seamless and requires attention.”

“In addition, he is a team player of the first order. His position on the war in Iraq was prescient and he stood by his assessment despite withering criticism. He is just what the next administration is looking for in its senior executives: people who are knowledgeable, honest, accountable, transparent and able to work in a bipartisan manner,” remarked the Congressman.

There are more than 54,000 veterans in the 7th Congressional District and Congressman Sestak frequently refers to the ‘perfect storm’ our Veterans face in their pursuit of the benefits they earned. WWII Vets are in their 80’s and 90’s, Korean War Vets are in their 70’s, the Vietnam Vets are in their 60’s, and the casualties of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost much more in human terms than their planners estimated. As a result, the VA has the enormous challenge of addressing the needs of three generations of Veterans at a time when health care costs have increased dramatically, and the nation is entering the second year of an increasingly severe recession. For example, in 2003, the VA stopped enrolling Priority 7 and 8 Vets in the VA Health Care System—that is wrong and Congressman Sestak is working with Chairman Filner of the House VA Committee to reverse that decision.

“When a Veteran is hurting, a family is hurting,” commented Sestak, stating that General Shinseki is ideally suited to engage the many issues that confront the VA. “The fact is, he was a Soldiers’ Soldier and is now a Veterans’ Veteran. He has my unqualified support and I look forward to working with him on behalf of our Veterans and their families.”

Since he has been in Congress, Congressman Sestak has been fighting for the men and women who have served and who are currently serving in our armed forces. He successfully passed two amendments to H.R. 1538, the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which will improve mental health care for our wounded soldiers. The first amendment highlights the fact that mental health care is an essential component to the medical services offered to our Veterans and the members of our Armed Services by clarifying that ‘medical care’ as defined in H.R. 1538 includes mental health care services.

The second amendment requires the Secretary of the Department of Defense to develop a plan to help prevent Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other stress-related psychopathologies (including substance abuse conditions) from developing in our military service members. In addition, it requires the Secretary to submit to Congress within 180 days a plan for establishing a Peer-Reviewed research program within the Defense Health Program's research and development function to research the prevention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how to best strengthen the psychological resiliency of our military service members. Both amendments passed with unanimous support.

Congressman Sestak also supported the Defense Authorization Bill, which provided funds for a number of important provisions for military personnel.

The Defense Authorization Bill:

- Prohibits increases in retiree and soldier health TRICARE and pharmacy user fees, which the Administration proposed to do in the midst of a war
- Authorizes a monthly payment of \$40 a month for surviving spouses who are denied the full amount of their Survivor Benefit Plan because of concurrently receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.
- Allows returning service personnel to authorize the Defense Department to provide their medical and health information to the Veterans Affairs Department.
- Provides resources that take care of our service members and their families by authorizing a 3.5% across-the-board pay raise (.5% above the Administration's proposal) for all service

members, which reduces the pay gap between the military and private sector to 3.4%. Congressman Sestak also voted in the FY 2007 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill to provide \$1.8 billion for veterans' medical care. In addition, in the FY 2008 budget, he voted to strengthen our national defense and honor our promises to our brave troops and veterans by providing the largest increase for veterans' health care in the history of our country – \$3.6 billion more than the President's budget and more than \$30 billion above the President over five years. This will help to ensure that the 1,145,918 veterans in Pennsylvania receive care worthy of their sacrifice.

One of the significant positions separating Congressman Sestak from his peers was his support for an appropriate GI Bill to ensure a post-secondary education to Americans who have put nation before self. The Congressman voted against weak legislation that did not cover the full cost of tuition, instead working toward a bill that guarantees a full college education for men and women who have served three years on active duty in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. With the legislation that the Congressman helped pass, the government will pay for four years of education up to the level of the most expensive in-state public school. In addition, servicemen and women who have at least three months on active duty since September 11, 2001, including those in the National Guard and Reserve, are given the ability to collect education benefits.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "DeepBlue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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